

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7780

INFO USMISSION EC BRUSSELS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 1850

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, GR

SUBJ: DREAMS OF GREEK-ARAB TOGETHERNESS

REF: ATHENS 1732 (NOTAL)

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS PASS AMBASSDOR KUBISCH

1. SUMMARY. TWO INITIATIVES THIS WEEK BY THE GOG, ONE IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE AND THE OTHER DIPLOMATIC, STRENGTHENED THE IMPRESSION THAT GREECE IS ACTIVELY SEEKING CLOSER RELATIONS WITH ARAB STATES. THE GOG MOVES WERE PROMPTED BY THE NEED OF FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS TO COVER HIS TRACKS AGAINST CHARGES OF HAVING BEEN ANTI-ARAB IN THE PAST AND BY VAGUE HOPES THAT A GENUINE COMMUNITY OF GREEK-ARAB ECONOMIC INTERESTS MAY BE ENCOURAGED. END SUMMARY.

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2.BACKGROUND.DURING LAST AUTUMN'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN ANDREAS

PAPANDREOU WAS THE FIRST GREEK POLITICAL LEADER TO CALL FOR CLOSER GREEK-ARAB RELATIONS, EVEN THOUGH SEVERAL JUNTA GOVERNMENTS HAD PREVIOUSLY EXPOUNDED HOPEFULLY ON GREEK-ARAB SOLIDARITY AND THE ANDROUTSOPOULOS GOVERNMENT HAD LAUNCHED ECONOMIC FEELERS AND HIGH LEVEL VISITORS TO SOME ARAB GOVERNMENTS AT THE TIME OF THE OIL SQUEEZE IN WINTER 1973-74. WITH THE POST-ELECTION APPOINTMENT OF BITSIOS AS FOREIGN MINISTER, PAPANDREOU BEGAN TO SHAPE HIS PRO-ARAB AND NEUTRALIST APPEALS INTO TANDEM ATTACKS UPON THE FOREIGN MINISTER, ACCUSING HIM AND THE CARAMANLIS GOVERNMENT OF DRAGGING ITS HEELS IN SEEKING OPENINGS TO THE ARABS.
END BACKGROUND.

3. GOG HAS ONLY RECENTLY BEGUN TO GIVE SERIOUS ATTENTION TO IMPROVEMENT IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB COUNTRIES. (REPORTED PLANS OF PM CARAMANLIS TO VISIT DAMASCUS NEVER MATERIALIZED.) THE GOG NOW HAS FIRMED UP A VISIT BY FONMIN BITSIOS TO EGYPT, MARCH 31-APRIL 3, FOLLOWING WHICH HE WILL GO TO LEBANON, APRIL 4-6. THE GOG ALSO RECENTLY ANNOUNCED THE APPOINTMENT OF A HIGH LEVEL COMMITTEE TO EXPLORE POSSIBILITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF GREECE'S ECONOMIC AND TRADE RELATIONS WITH COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA.

4. THE FIRST MEETING OF THIS COMMITTEE THIS WEEK WAS CHAIRED BY MINISTER OF COORDINATION PAPALIGOURAS AND RECEIVED PRIME MEDIA TREATMENT. (THE COMMITTEE'S PERMANENT CHAIRMAN IS NEW DEMOCRACY DEPUTY JOHN TSOUDEROS.) AMONG SPECIFIC GOG GOALS ARE PROMOTION OF EXPORTS OF GOODS AND SERVICES TO ARAB STATES, ARRANGEMENT OF MORE FAVORABLE TERMS FOR CRUDE OIL PROCUREMENT THROUGH DIRECT GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS, AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF ARAB CAPITAL FLOWS INTO GREECE. GREEK ENGINEERING FIRMS HAVE LED THE WAY IN MID EASTERN BUSINESS, AND RECENT REPORTS ESTIMATE THEIR INVOLVEMENT AT \$600 MILLION LEVEL. THE NATIONAL INVESTMENT BANK FOR INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IS REPORTEDLY SEEKING ARAB PARTICIPATION IN A JOINING GREEK-ARAB
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INVESTMENT BANK TO BE LOCATED IN GREECE.

5. GOG ALSO THIS WEEK ASKED PARLIAMENT TO FUND OPENING OF GREEK EMBASSY IN KUWAIT WHICH WILL SERVE ENTIRE GULF REGION. BITSIOS TOOK OCCASION OF THIS PARLIAMENTARY DISCUSSION TO SEND "MESSAGE TO THE ARAB WORLD" IN ADVANCE OF HIS VISIT THERE AND TO ANSWER CRITICISM THAT HE HAS BEEN ANTI-ARAB. HE TOLD

PARLIAMENT MARCH 5 THAT ESTABLISHMENT OF EMBASSY IN KUWAIT WOULD COMPLETE GREECE'S REPRESENTATION IN ARAB WORLD AND THAT GOG HAS SOUGHT CONSENT OF SAUDI ARABIA, SYRIA AND IRAQ FOR ACCREDITATION OF AMBASSADORS. KEY SENTENCE IN SPEECH WAS: "THROUGHOUT THE YEARS, ARAB VOICES HAVE REPEATEDLY BEEN RAISED IN FAVOR OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CYPRIOT PEOPLE. WE HAVE STOOD AT THE SIDE OF THE ARABS IN THEIR STRUGGLE, AND BECAUSE GREECE DOES NOT ACCEPT THE CONQUEST OF LANDS BY THE USE OF FORCE, SHE STANDS AT THE SIDE OF THE ARABS, UNTIL THEIR RIGHTS HAVE BEEN RECOGNISED, INCLUDING THE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE TO SELF-DETERMINATION."

6. COMMENT: BITSIOS' REMARKS IN PARLIAMENT DO NOT REFLECT A CHANGE IN GOG POLICY ON MIDDLE EAST, ALTHOUGH THE QUOTATION CITED ABOVE, COMBINED WITH A SIMILAR REFERENCE TO THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE IN THE RECENT JOINT BITSIOS-MACOVESCU COMMUNIQUE (REFTEL), INDICATES A NEW WILLINGNESS TO BE EXPLICIT IN SIGNALLING GREEK SUPPORT FOR ARAB CLAIMS IN ANY NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IN THE ME. THE KEY ELEMENTS DETERMINING GREEK POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST REMAIN CYPRUS, WITH GREEK PASSION FOR KEEPING ARAB VOTES LINED UP IN SUPPORT GREEK-CYPRIOT CLAIMS AND TO COUNTER INCIPIENT FEARS OF TURKISH GAINS WITH ARABS; FAVORABLE REPRESENTATION ON BEHALF OF THE STILL SIZEEABLE GREEK COMMUNITIES IN EGYPT, THE SUDAN, AND THE LEBANON; BITSIOS' DOMESTIC POLITICAL NEED TO GET PAPANDREOU OFF HIS BACK, WHICH HE HAS NOW APPARENTLY DONE ALTHOUGH, WE SUSPECT, ONLY FOR SHORT TIME; AND THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO GREECE OF CLOSER FINANCIAL AND TRADE RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB

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WORLD.

7. THERE IS AS MUCH ILLUSION AS SUBSTANCE TO THE SEVERAL STEPS THUS FAR ANNOUNCED AND THE PARLIAMENTARY RECORD POINTS OUT SOME BASIC FLAWS UNDERMINING THE IMPRESSION OF A BOLD AND HOPEFUL GREEK OPENING TO THE ARAB WORLD. THE MONEY REQUESTED FOR THE KUWAIT EMBASSY, FOR EXAMPLE, IS ONLY \$27,000 FOR THE FIRST YEAR AND ONE DEPUTY POINTED OUT THAT "ONE AMBASSADOR, TWO SECRETARIES, AND ONE JANITOR DO NOT REPRESENT A PROMISING ADVANCE WITH THE ARABS." ANOTHER DEPUTY ALLEGED THAT THE GOG MAINTAINS ONLY ONE COMMERCIAL OFFICER IN ALL ITS ARAB POSTS. THUS FAR THE GOG DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ABLE TO INVEST MUCH MONEY OR PERSONNEL IN CHASING THE ARAB POT OF GOLD.

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